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## Area School Gets \$100,000 Grant

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**SUN CITY CENTER** - A local philanthropic organization recently gave the principal of Gibsonton Elementary School a huge helping hand - in the form of a \$100,000 grant, which will be given over a three-year period.

Evelyn Lunsford, chairwoman of the Greater Sun City Center Community Foundation, said the donation is part of an initiative started by the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay, her group's parent organization.

"The money must be used in nontraditional ways to raise the school's grade level," Lunsford said. "Gibsonton was picked because of its 'C' grade."

The school has 705 students. Eighty-four percent are in the free- or reduced-lunch program; 84 percent are economically disadvantaged; 37 percent have a limited use of English; and 25 percent have been designated as special needs.

"We expect to do great things with this donation," said Donna Marra, principal of the school. "And we expect to have many positive interactions with members of the foundation as a result. I'm very excited."

Marra said she will focus on academics, parental involvement, culture and character throughout the project. The money will be used for incentives, technology and materials not covered by the Hillsborough County school district's annual budget.

Lunsford said the initiative includes a contract with the Council for Educational Change, a

nonprofit private educational foundation that partners with the Florida Department of Education, corporations and foundations to advance school success through its Partners to Advance School Success (PASS) program.

Founded in 1999, PASS has a mission of improving student achievement in underperforming schools and enhancing the leadership abilities of the school's principal and staff, said Elaine Liftin, council president and director. As part of its commitment to the PASS educational model, the council will match the \$100,000 grant awarded by the community foundation.

"To us, the PASS program is very exciting," Lunsford said, "because we're able to adopt Gibsonton Elementary School."

Charles Blumenkamp, a retired Verizon executive, will mentor Marra, sharing his expertise and teaching her business strategies to elevate student performance. A three-year plan will be developed, and data analysis will establish benchmarks for the school. The council and the Greater Sun City Center Community Foundation will require documentation of expenditures and monitor the results.

Lunsford said normally large corporations would be involved in such gift giving, "but none had stepped forward in south county."

So the Greater Sun City Center Community Foundation, with its large sums of unrestricted funds and donors who have chosen education as their gift priority, came through.

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